

# Commission Quarterly

Vol. 18 Issue 4

Summer 2003

Published by Friends of the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission

Lincoln, Nebraska

## Congratulations Burns, Job Well Done



*Commissioner Holly Burns is the newly appointed director for the Hispanic Community Center*

Appointed to the LLWC Advisory Board as a commissioner in March 2002 by former Mayor Don Wesely and serving as a member-at-large officer, Holly Burns was appointed executive director of the Hispanic Community Center in May 2003.

Her strong professional and personnel background prepared her well for this position which she interined for several months after the department of Joel Garjardo. Burns worked at the Mexican-American Department as an administrative assistant, and helped the Hispanic community in meeting their needs.

She has served as a board member for the Nebraskaland Association for Translators and Interpreters, the Center for At-Risk Children's Services at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, the Hispanic Center, Lincoln Journal Star Multicultural Advisory Committee, Urban Development Task Force and Lincoln Public School's Bright Lights program.

Her community volunteer service includes acting as event coordinator for Haymarket Hey Days, YWCA youth mentor and teaching CCD at St. Mary's Catholic Church. ■

## Welcome Aboard Newly Elected Mayor Coleen Seng



After serving 16 years as the Northeast representative on the City Council, Coleen Seng won the mayoral election to become Lincoln's 50th mayor. Twenty-seven years have passed since Mayor Helen Boosalis, who was instrumental in the creation of LLWC, was

in office. Mayor Seng, also a member of Friends, continues to be a strong supporter of the projects and programs sponsored by the Women's Commission. ■

## August is National Breastfeeding Month

The City of Lincoln's established employer-supported breastfeeding policy allows for a private room and electric pump for expressing milk during work hours. The Women's Commission applauds the City and County administrations for creating a family-friendly workplace environment. ■

## September is Hispanic Heritage Month

The Hispanic Center will be hosting its annual Hispanic Festival at Antelope Park on Saturday, Sept. 29, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Come join in on the fun, music and ethnic food. ■

### Calendar of Events

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are held in the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission conference room at the K Street Complex, 440 South 8th Street, Ste. 100, Lincoln, NE, 68508. Phone: 441-7716, fax: 441-6824.

### JULY

- 4 - OFFICE CLOSED, Independence Day
- 9 - 5:45 p.m. Regular commission meeting
- 24 - 5:30 p.m. WomenTalk taping

### AUGUST

- NATIONAL BREASTFEEDING MONTH
- 13 - 5:45 p.m. Regular Commission meeting
- Officer elections
- 21 - 4 p.m. WomenLINC networking event, 407 S. 14th St.
- 26 - Equality Day, Woman's Suffrage

### SEPTEMBER

- HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH
- 1 - OFFICE CLOSED for Labor Day
- 10 - 5:45 p.m. Regular commission meeting
- 18 - 5:30 p.m. WomenTalk taping
- 30 - Fall Commission Quarterly distributed.



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*Commission Quarterly*

**Another Proud Member of**





# If she were here today, do you ever wonder what she would have to say?

## \*An open letter to Susan B. Anthony

By Bonnie Coffey, director, Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission



*Susan B. Anthony*

*In commemoration of the Woman's Suffrage Movement, celebrated on August 26th. Our fore-mothers fought bravely for the same privileges as the men had exercised for a century before - the right to vote.*

Women then had the formidable task of convincing 3/4 of the states to ratify the amendment. And Susan, women did you proud! They marched, they spoke in public when it wasn't seemly to speak in public, they held rallies, they sent postcards, they wrote books, they argued and it all came down to one single vote in the Tennessee legislature.

That one vote belonged to a man named Harry Burn, and he voted for the legislation because he had received a very important note. The note read, "Dear Son - Vote for suffrage and don't keep them in doubt ... be a good boy. With lots of love, Mama." And so, by one single, solitary vote, the women's suffrage movement had won. On August 26, 1920, what was called the "Anthony Amendment" was signed into law - the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America - giving us the right to go into the voting booth - imagine that! Women all over the country voted in the November 1920 presidential election, and oh, Susan, what a sight that was!

Even the women who weren't very supportive of you were there to vote, and I swear, I think that all along, they were really and truly hoping that the suffragettes would win, that they'd get the legislation passed, but they were too afraid to say anything, they were too scared to speak out and to be the first. Oh, Susan, it was glorious - women all bundled up with their best hats and their handbags, going to the voting sites in groups because it was new and it was scary. It's hard to believe that when you first introduced the Sentiment of Woman's Rights in Seneca Falls back in 1848 that this was how it would end.

Dear Susan,

Having a wonderful time ... wish you were here.

Let me bring you up to date on what's been going on! Where do I start?

So much has happened. Well, of course, we did get the vote, Susan, hooray for you and hooray for us! In 1917, men in twelve states had voted for women suffrage, sometimes by very narrow margins, but they passed nonetheless.

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*"Having a wonderful time, Susan ...  
wish you were here."*

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I can remember the time when you actually got arrested for trying to vote, Susan - I still can't believe meek little you did that! Do you recall how the judge refused to let the jury even consider the evidence and actually ordered them to find you guilty - if that isn't the most outrageous thing I ever heard! He fined you \$100, Susan - what a huge amount of money for you then, but you got even, didn't you, Susan? You never did pay a single penny of that fine, did you? You go, girl!!

Well, here's just a rundown of what's happened since then, Susan:

In 1923, the Supreme Court struck down laws that provided minimum wages for women because they said they were discriminatory against men.

In 1924, our first two women governors were elected: Nellie Taylor Ross of Wyoming and Miriam Ferguson of Texas.

In 1932, Hattie Wyatt Caraway of Arkansas was the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate. That was the same year that a young woman named Amelia Earhart would fly over the Atlantic - all by herself.

In 1932, a young athlete we knew as Babe Didrikson won 6 gold medals and set 4 world records in just 3 hours at a national track meet. She set more world records than any other athlete of her time.

In 1933, Frances Perkins became our first woman cabinet member as Secretary of Labor.

In 1941, millions of women went to work outside the home because World War II took the men to battle, of course, when

the men returned, those women were all told to go back home and bake bread and clean bathrooms again ... like THAT was going to happen!!

But go back home, we did. In 1950, families moved in droves to what we called the suburbs, and that was supposed to produce the Happy Housewife - it didn't work.

In 1960, the birth control pill came on the market, forever altering our choices of when to have families.

In 1963, President Kennedy received a report from a group that he had appointed - the Commission on the Status of Women - that detailed widespread sex discrimination throughout the country. He also signed into law the Equal Pay Act that was supposed to end wage discrimination.

In 1964, a last minute addition to the Civil Rights Act prohibited job discrimination based on sex.

In 1967, what we called the Women's Liberation Movement began with consciousness raising sessions held all across the country.

In 1969, the Supreme Court upheld the principle of equality in the workplace, ruling that women cannot be barred from jobs for which they have the requirements.

In 1972, we began to see our first rape crisis centers developing, raising awareness that rape is a crime of violence, not sexual impulse. That was the same year that Congress passed Title IX, requiring equality for men and women in education that prompted improved women's sports programs at many high schools and colleges.

In 1974, Congress passed the Women's Educational Equity Act that called for the development of nonsexist teaching materials, and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act prohibiting financial discrimination against women.

In 1976, women were admitted to U.S. Military Academies.

In 1980, for the first time, men and women voters favored different candidates, creating our first "gender gap."

In 1981, Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman justice on the Supreme Court.

In 1982, the Equal Rights Amendment - the one that would prohibit all forms of sex discrimination - was defeated after ten years.

In 1983, Sally Ride was the first woman in space.

In 1984, Geraldine Ferraro was the first woman vice-president candidate nominated by a major political party.

In 1986, the Supreme Court outlawed sexual harassment in the workplace as a form of job discrimination.

In 1992, the American Association of University Women published their study of the decrease in self-esteem in girls as a result of discrimination in class.

In 1997, the Women's National Basketball Association was founded, and Madeline Albright was appointed to Secretary of State, making her the highest ranking woman in U.S. History.

In 1999, over 90,000 people attended the U.S. World Cup soccer games, the biggest event in the history of women's sports, and watched American women win the title.

Susan, we owe you so much - for being so brave, so persistent, for being so damn patient! Did your mother know that you were destined for greatness? Did your father tell you that you were going to make history? And I'm just curious here, Susan, just what was it that lit the spark that burned for a good portion of your life, a spark that would turn into a torch for women in America? I mean, there are days that I get all fired up about something. With

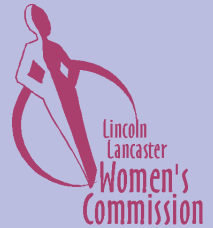
me these days, it's childcare, pay equity and political participation for women. But for you, Susan, what was it? Every now and then, I transport myself back in time to your day in 1848, starting my days with layer upon layer of clothing, as if I were a caterpillar weaving a cocoon to protect myself until I could emerge a full blown butterfly, beautiful and free.

So that's part of how I imagine you in the long black dress that you wore for most of your photographs, living a frugal, simple life. But what I don't know, Susan, is what created the intense passion that consumed your entire life? That's what I'd like to know! As you have read, dear Susan, we have gone so much farther than I think you would have ever imagined, but not as far as you would have hoped.

With all these wonderful gains, with the dreams that you so carefully tended and fought for all those years, we're not quite there. In fact, we've actually gone backwards. It saddens me, Susan. I know it would sadden you. The lines of women who stood in the cold to vote on that November election day in 1920, Susan, they're not there anymore. I don't know what happened, I really don't. Gosh, women now make up 52% of the nation's population. That's a majority and we have the chance - a very real chance - to make some significant changes in what's going on in the country today, and we haven't taken it. I have asked women if they're registered to vote and they tell me, no.

When I ask why, I get a shrug of the shoulders. A shrug, Susan, a shrug to commemorate all your entire life's work and the dedicated efforts of thousands of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers. And other

*(Continued to page 6 - Dear Susan, Wish You Were Here)*



*An original Woman's Suffrage voter's ribbon, "I Cast My FIRST VOTE," dated Nov. 2, 1920, courtesy of Bonnie Coffey and her Women's History Collection*



### 19th Amendment

*"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."*

*The nineteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States was proposed to the legislatures of the several States by the Sixty-sixth Congress, on the 4th of June, 1919, and was declared, in a proclamation of the Secretary of State, dated the 26th of August, 1920, to have been ratified by the legislatures of 36 of the 48 States.*

## WHY NEBRASKA WOMEN

*"If American women would increase their voting turnout by just 10%, we would see an end to the budget cuts in the programs that benefit women and children," ...Coretta Scott King.*



## NEED TO VOTE

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# Pay Equity Doesn't Add Up in Real Life

Hard to believe, isn't it? There is no law written in the Nebraska Statutes that read, *"thou shalt not discuss your wage, and/or compensation packages with co-workers, friends or family."*

In fact, that's the beauty of our First Amendment - the freedom of speech. But some employers disagree and will hang any person out to dry for attempting to get too "snoopy" with a co-worker's salary.

Nevertheless, how in the world did talking about wages get to be such a cultural no-no? Why is it politically incorrect to ask your co-worker - who does the

EXACT same job - how much they make? Wait ... isn't that called wage comparison?

There are some employers in the private sector who have implemented policies that forbids discussing wages between employees - an offense worthy of being fired on the spot. On the flip side, maybe they don't want their employees to find out how badly they've discriminated the wages between the sexes.

*"Worth More Than We Earn: Equal Pay for Women"* focuses on the harsh reality that national averages indicates women earn less than men in comparable job settings and markets.

Join WomenTalk guests, Dr. Ann Mari May, associate professor in Economics for the University of Nebraska Lincoln College of Business and Dr. Gerise Herndon, director of Women's Studies at Nebraska Wesleyan University to hear more on discussions of national trends and struggles of women to earn as much as their counterparts. WomenTalk was comoderated by Commissioner Bridget Christensen and Director Bonnie Coffey. ■

## There's No Place Like Home

Home is where the heart is and that includes ABWA meetings, BPW presentations or chilling at the local community center.

Women looking to join a woman's club, create new networking opportunities or squeeze out a few volunteer hours can find their special "home" on the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Alliance web site.

Located within the city's "Interlinc" web site system, the Women's Alliance (LLWA) directory offers a wide variety of information on individual clubs and organizations, including contact information. The LLWA directory offers nine categories of interest:

- Business & Professional
- Sororities & Alumni
- Higher Education
- State & Local
- Cultural, Religious & Ethnic
- Community Centers
- Political & Nonpartisan
- Social, Civic & Charitable
- Agencies, Support Groups & Services

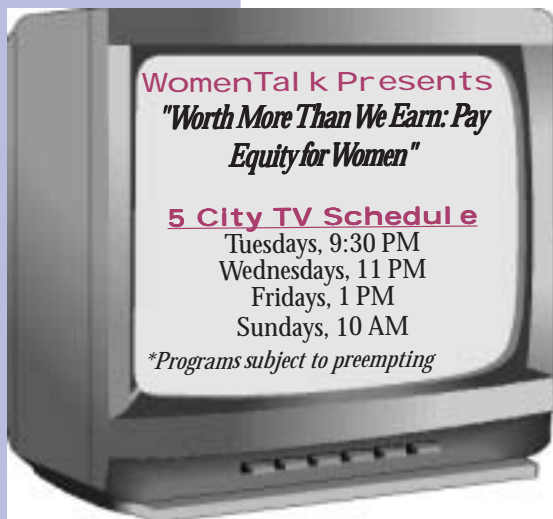


If your organization or agency would like to post information free of charge, an application can be obtained from the web site's index page, or call 441-7716 and one will be snail-mailed to you.

If you are a member of any listed organization or agency, and need to update your web pages, please call 441-7717.

This community service is sponsored by the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission. ■

[www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/mayor/women/alliance.htm](http://www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/mayor/women/alliance.htm)



WomenTalk Presents  
*"Worth More Than We Earn: Pay Equity for Women"*

### 5 City TV Schedule

Tuesdays, 9:30 PM  
Wednesdays, 11 PM  
Fridays, 1 PM  
Sundays, 10 AM

*\*Programs subject to preempting*

July's taping of WomenTalk will focus on *"Perspectives of African-American Women: Seeing the Dream,"* featuring Harriet McLeod, National Council of Negro Women and Barbara Tolliver-Haskins of State Farm Insurance.

The century old saying still holds true today: *it's not what you know, it's who you know that gets the job done, or more so, gets you that job!*

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Commission Quarterly

## Join Us At WomenLINC's Networking Events

Introducing a new networking event, WomenLINC is a program designed for women to network with women in the Lincoln and Lancaster County area. Serving as director for the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission, Bonnie Coffey will briefly discuss the importance of "Networking 101" on Thursday, August 21, 2003 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the Lincoln Woman's Club, 407 S. 14<sup>th</sup> St., Lincoln, Neb.

WomenLINC is a new program that brings together young women and established women from all walks of life to create opportunities of leadership, role modeling and education.. This is a great opportunity for women to exchange information, resources, support and ideas.

Mark your calendars as future networking events are scheduled at the Lincoln Woman's Club for August 21 and October 16, 2003. ■

Thursday, August 21, 2003  
*WomenLINC Networking Event*

**Bonnie Coffey**  
**"Networking 101"**

Thursday, 4-6 p.m.  
Lincoln Woman's Club 407 S. 13th St.



## Anyone Call For a Cablegirl?

Women working in male-dominated industries face numerous barriers to success in the workplace, ranging from stereotypes to sexual harassment. With women comprising less than 25 percent of nontraditional occupations' workforces, female workers often feel isolated and unwelcome. But the upside for women working in nontraditional jobs is challenging work with good pay and advancement opportunities. High tech jobs will be the "place to be" in the future.

For example, when was the last time you heard someone say, "Hey, the cablegirl's at the door, can someone get it that!"

According to Time Warner Cable public relations spokesperson, Ann Shrewsbury, Lincoln ranks at the top for the highest percentage of female technicians and installers employed in the 36 cable divisions. In fact, the division has a female installation supervisor, which is uncommon. Four out of 18 installers are women; one in ten works as a construction technician; two out of three work as Lead installers; one woman out of six is a Road Runner technician and one in 14 works as a service technician. A career as a cable installer is strictly "on the job training" and worthy of applying; positions come open regularly and most women, said Shrewsbury, use it as a stepping stone to further their careers in the technological industry.

Although Lincoln offers many different types of higher learner institutions, Southeast Community College offers a two-year program on various nontraditional careers for women such as automotive repair specialist, professional truck driver training, construction and welding. ■

## News Flash

New to the Women's Commission web site is the ability and availability to download past and current news releases, and retrieve back issues of the Commission Quarterly newsletter. For more information, go to: <http://www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/mayor/women/index.htm>. ■

## Attention CQ Readers

The *Commission Quarterly* newsletter, funded by Friends of the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission - a 501 (3)(c) nonprofit organization- is written by women for women about such women's issues as domestic violence, employment, wage disparity, substance abuse, affordable housing, child care, sexual assault, health care, poverty, discrimination, reproductive rights, education and equality.

Four times a year, the newsletter brings current information on politics, education, employment, family, health and safety issues to your mailbox **FREE** of charge.

Before each mailing, names and address are reviewed to ensure accurate mailing addresses and distribution routes. If you have received this publication in error or you want to become a subscriber, please call LLWC Public Information Specialist Diane Mullins, 441-7717, or leave a voice mail message. ■



### Commission Quarterly Newsletter

The Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission (LLWC) is an Advisory Board created by elected officials to advise the Mayor, Lincoln City Council and Lancaster County Board on issues that impact women. Please address any correspondence to: Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission, 440 S. 8th St., Ste. 100, Lincoln NE 68508-2294 or call (402) 441-7717.

#### Editorial Policy:

The Commission Quarterly is a publication of Friends of the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission. Publishing costs are paid by Friends. Materials appearing in this publication shall be in accordance with the purposes, goals and official positions of the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission and Friends of the Women's Commission. The Commission Quarterly is published four times a year: January, April, July and October.

#### Criteria for Publication:

Submission by community groups and individuals are welcome. Deadlines are the first of the month preceding the month of publication. Articles are subject to editing, with the author's compliance. Specific opinions expressed are not necessarily the opinions held by LLWC employees, its Commissioners or Friends of the Women's Commission.

#### Advertising

Advertising is available in a business card sized ad and will be accepted as space is available on a first come, first serve basis. All ads should be camera ready and must be submitted one month before the publication date. For more information on advertising opportunities, call 441-7717.

#### Friends of the Commission

Friends of the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission is a 501 (c)(3) organization that solicits funds for the commission's projects.

#### LLWC Staff

Karen Wamsley, office specialist; Diane Mullins, public information specialist, and Bonnie Coffey, director.

#### Friends Executive Board

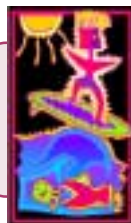
Marcia Kushner, president; Georgia Glass, treasurer; Karen Dienstbier, secretary and Beatty Brasch, immediate past president.

#### CQ Committee

Bonnie Coffey and Diane Mullins.

#### LLWC Commissioners

Dr. Mary Beck, president; Holly Burns, member-at-large; Bridget Christensen, Dr. Gwendolyn M. Combs, Helen Fagan, member-at-large; Renee Geller, Jennifer Gutierrez, Nancy Intermill, vice-president; Dr. Venita Kelley, Janet Lu, Maria Medrano-Nehls, Colleen Ozanne, Nicole Simon, Roberta Stick, past president, and Kathleen Uhrmacher.



### SURFING THE WEB AGAIN? CLICK HERE!

[www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/mayor/women/index](http://www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/mayor/women/index)

Summer Issue 2003



### Mission Statement

*Working as a division of the Mayor's Office since 1976, the Lincoln-Lancaster Women's Commission strives to fulfill its mission of advising City and County officials of social, economic and legal barriers that prevent women from choosing their roles in the family, the labor force and society in general, and working toward the elimination of those barriers. With 15 volunteers and a paid staff of three, the Commission continues to engage in activities designed to heighten community awareness in the areas of self-sufficiency, health care, safety, education and act as a clearinghouse of information for women in need.*

**Commission Quarterly**

*(Continued from page 3: Dear Susan, Wish You Were Here)*

women who are registered, don't go vote.

Now, when we go vote, we have the chance to put a sticker on our jacket that says, "I voted!" Well, Susan, I've made a sticker that I'm going to get printed and hand out to women that adds a little more to the subject. It reads, "Susan, this one's for you!! I voted!!" Maybe that will help us remember your struggle, your fight and remind us that it wasn't so long ago that we didn't get to vote and that ALL of us should be voting!

I'm so sorry, Susan. They don't know that you didn't get to see your dream realized or that you spent 50 years of your life trying to win the vote for women, or that it took women 72 years - 72 years to finally claim that right to vote, a right that you never got to enjoy. And Susan, we're just not there yet. We may have won the right to vote, but we've never won the respect and right of being sharing partners. As far as we've come, as much as we've accomplished, we are still fighting ... still fighting to earn the same pay, still fighting to work at the same jobs, still fighting to run the same country, still fighting to not be beaten and raped. Still fighting to not be trivialized, still fighting to raise a family and work, still fighting to be counted. The laws are on the books, Susan, but you'd never know it.

- In America - White women earn only 72 cents for every dollar a man earns. Our sisters of color earn even less.

- In America - Over 2/3 of all women workers are employed in jobs that pay minimum wage.

- In America - women make up 60% of the aging population and outnumber men 2 to 1 in the over-75 age group, where health care costs are highest.

- In America - Half of the elderly women living alone in the United States have incomes of less than \$9,500 per year.

- In America - Nearly a third of all families maintained by women are living below the poverty level.

- In America - occupations with high concentrations of women of color are the lowest paid of all women's jobs, including household domestic work, agricultural labor and garment production.

- In America - 55% of the women employed by state and local governments work in the lowest-paying jobs categories, compared to 25% of men.

- In America - in 1975, 48% of people polled said that women did not have equal job opportunities with men; In 1993, that number rose to 60%.

- In America - women-owned businesses receive only 1.5% of the \$200 Billion spent by the U.S. government to purchase goods and services.

- In America - women employed full time outside the home do 70% of the housework. Full time housewives do 83%.

- In America - federal funding for maternal and child health has decreased 23.4% in the past 10 years.

We have a judge who revoked custody of the daughter of a woman who had to work outside the home because he said that she wasn't a "fit" mother. Companies are paying millions of dollars in sexual harassment settlements because the men who lead these companies forced secretaries to have sex and found nothing wrong with the practice. We have interviewers asking women if they're sure they want to be applying for the job, asking them if they shouldn't be home taking care of children. In 1955, Adlai Stevenson gave an address at Smith College encouraging the new graduates to participate in politics through the role of wife and mother rather than define themselves by a profession. We have state constitutions that don't even mention the word "women" or "she" or "her." We have countries with lawmakers that claim that women who wore jeans couldn't possibly be raped because their jeans were so tight that they couldn't be pulled down. We have boards of directors that are totally devoid of women in their membership. When those wonderful women won the world soccer championship, what we heard the most about was how one of them - in jubilation - took off her jersey to reveal a sports bra that covered considerably more than what most people see on television. We have small girls kidnapped and sexually assaulted, and sometimes murdered. Women who worked for federal law-enforcement agencies were not allowed to carry guns until 1971. In the late 60's, a group of female staffers were thrown out of New York City's Plaza Hotel for wearing pantsuits to lunch. Oh, and that Equal Pay Act that President Kennedy signed in 1963? President Clinton made a speech calling for rededicated efforts for equal pay in January of 1999 because we still didn't have pay equity.

I wonder what you'd do if you were here now - how would you gather us together, talk to us, strategize to mobilize all of us to make that final difference again? How would you motivate us to march as the suffragettes did, sometimes over 2,000 strong, striding down the street with banners and hats and determined resolve....how do we do that now, Susan? How do we get all of us to unite in a single voice for what we know is right? How do we rally ourselves to make sure that every single solitary woman votes? What secrets are there, what words did you use because that's what we lost - we lost the passion. We found the freedom that you sought for us, that you struggled so long for, but we somehow lost the passion.

Susan, through your efforts and the efforts of those incredible women who worked for 14 years on the legacy you left, we learned that we are strong, stronger than we ever, ever imagined.

We learned - as you said in the very last speech you gave - failure is impossible.

We cannot go back to before.

Dear Susan, having a wonderful time. Wish you were here. ■



# The President's Letter

By Mary Beck

As the time approaches for turnover in the LLWC leadership, I've taken time to reflect on the challenges that faced us and the accomplishments realized.

First, though, a word about the Commission - a remarkable, diverse group of women absolutely dedicated to making a difference for everyone in Lincoln and Lancaster County, Nebraska. Why, though, with the name *LL Women's Commission*, do I say for *everyone*?

It is true that our initiatives are specifically aimed at women and girls, to empower them to take control of their lives and destinies, to increase their participation in all elements of life, to enhance their ability to become financially responsible and psychologically strong, to speak for them when a voice is needed. The difference for everyone is realized in the benefit that must occur when those who have historically and traditionally been disenfranchised (women, of every racial and ethnic background) become empowered. The men in their lives and in our society benefit directly and substantively when women are full participants. Does this mean that we have achieved that goal?

Of course not; but we have made significant progress this year. The outreach efforts of the LLWC make a difference at several levels: through communication with the Mayor and the City Council and County Commission; through ascertaining the issues of women in our community and attempting to address those; through political activism at candidates' forums; through development of informational brochures and self-help, easy to use guides; through the efforts of the *Friends of the Commission* organization; through the ongoing, very successful WomenTalk broadcast on Channel 5; by participation in the tremendous program, Girls and Women in Sports and Fitness, an annual recognition program cosponsored by many community agencies and athletic departments; by advising Bonnie Coffey, the Commission's remarkable and able Director; through personal contacts and exchanges.

Take a couple of examples: this past year we organized internally around two broad themes - public policy and health care. These crystallized out of some serious strategic thinking we

undertook a year or so ago. They fit very well, it turned out, with the issues identified in the Women's Voices survey results released recently by the Commission.

Under the public policy umbrella, members of the LLWC participated in and cosponsored one candidates' forum, posing pointed questions for candidates for all positions. Mayoral candidates were invited to attend a Commission meeting for open, candid exchanges of philosophy and issues.

A question guide for women to use in sorting out which candidates best address their

issues is being developed and will be ready for distribution this year.

On the women's health care side, efforts are underway to develop self-help guides for women to use in interacting with doctors and other health professionals and in how to navigate our very complicated health care system.

A longer term goal, ideally, would be eventually to translate these guides into several languages; in any case, however, efforts will be made to reach - through the various agencies and commissions perhaps - women who do not speak English, so that our rapidly increasing non-English speaking community can participate more fully in essential services.

Because the members of the Commission are volunteers with very busy schedules, progress is often not as quick as we would like to have it; our passion for creating change for women and girls far exceeds our capacity to make that happen.

One of our most successful accomplishments this year, though, has been the internal focusing of our efforts on the two initiatives, public policy and health care, to maximize outcomes and minimize splintering of our limited time and resources.

As a group, even with our disparate backgrounds and points of view, we share a common vision that girls and women can be empowered; we are mindful of the public trust as we work toward this goal. ■



*Dr. Mary Beck,  
LLWC President  
2002/2003*



## Mary Beck, PhD

*Employed by the University of Nebraska, Mary works on East campus as a professor in Animal Science. Among many other achievements, she earned the Feminist of the Year award in 2002 for her work for women's equity and equality on campus.*

***KUDOS!  
KUDOS!  
KUDOS!***

*Congratulations to Holly Burns who was selected to received the Latina Leadership of the Year Award from the National Foundation of Women Legislators last April. WTGG!*

***Summer Issue 2003***



# Business and the Working Woman

## Trick Questions or Illegal Questions, You Decide

### **Trick Questions?**

### **Next Step:**

*If you have experienced an interviewing situation that concerns you and want to check it out, contact the Lincoln Commission on Human Rights, 441-7624, or the Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission, 471-2024. This service is free.*

Interview questions can be tricky, especially if you really NEED that job or you really WANT that job. You've read all the employment magazines, self-help support books and watched a dozen talk shows on professional advice and tips on how to get the job of your dreams.

With confidence and a well-rehearsed presentation of your talents, backgrounds and skills, you're ready for that jackpot interview.

But what if questions are asked that you weren't prepared for about your personal life? At what point does chit-chat small talk turn into an invasion of your privacy with questionable implications of harming career goals with the company in mind?



### **Illegal Questions**

During an employment interview, a female candidate was asked, "Do you plan to have children?"

She was taken aback by the question and wasn't sure how to answer.

She had three choices:

1. To answer the question honestly even though she did not want to.
2. To tell the interviewer it is none of his business and the question is illegal.
3. To deal with the concern behind the question, ignoring the illegal question itself.

How would you answer the question if you were the female candidate?

The best answer is "C."

An appropriate answer from the candidate might have been, "Whether or not I plan to have children in the future is not really relevant to my career. I plan to work and have a career no matter what happens in my personal life."

Why is this type of question asked in an interview? Why are interviewers concerned about your plans to reproduce, your marital status and your retirement plans? It's simple. They want to make sure you are the solution to a problem, not the source of more headaches.

When the female candidate was asked her plans regarding future motherhood, the interviewer may have been trying to determine whether she was in for

the long-term or just until the company could pay for the birth of her firstborn. It is clearly a discriminatory question, one that would probably never be asked of a male candidate, and it is illegal!

Technically, it is illegal for an interviewer to ask anything personal that is not directly job-related. Off-limit questions include (but are not limited to): information regarding your age, marital status, country of origin, religion, sexual preference and health status. Almost any legal information about you is illegal in the job interview.

There are some exceptions to this rule, which might be confusing. Personal questions considered to be job-related usually are allowed in the interview or on the job application.

### **Legal Personal Questions:**

*Have you ever been convicted of a crime?*

Depending on the type of job you are applying for, this could be critical.

*Can you show proof of your eligibility to work in the US?* Every new employee, regardless of place of origin, must provide such documentation during the first days on the job.

*Can you perform the job's essential functions with or without reasonable accommodation?* This question must be accompanied by a job description covering the essential functions.

The concerns behind these questions are relevant to the job's requirements and performance. As an example, if you have been convicted of embezzlement, you will probably not be considered for a job handling money. The concern is that you had a problem in your past that could be a problem again.

The interviewer wants to know if you can report to work and do the job. Any information that could be enlightening is important. But the interviewer's questions should focus on the job and your qualifications to do it.

By becoming aware of illegal questions, you will be prepared to deal with them if confronted in an interview. Pre-interview thinking and preparation can spare some embarrassing or uncomfortable moments during the interview. ■